Faithfulness and fearlessness in North Korea.
Not on bread alone
The life of a North Korean church leader

Kidnapping and sexual violence against Christians are widespread in Nigeria. Here’s how your prayers and support are helping believers find wholeness through Jesus.

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Presence magazine showcases the powerful stories of faith of persecuted Christians, while showing how God is at work through the united Body of Christ around the world.

About Open Doors
For over 60 years, Open Doors has worked in the world’s most oppressive countries, empowering Christians who are persecuted for their faith.

Open Doors Core Values
We are part of the Body of Christ, a people-to-people people
We are persecuted church-driven
We are people of the Bible
We are people of prayer
We live and work by faith
We are devoted to Jesus Christ and His commission
We are motivated solely for the glory of God

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One can’t tell the story of faith without telling the story of persecution.

When I look at the story of the persecuted church, I sometimes strain to see more than suffering. For the first time in 20 years, another country—Afghanistan—rivals North Korea as the worst place to be a Christian. Religious violence in Nigeria has risen off the charts. China’s surveillance state is censoring more and more church members. And India, the world’s largest democracy, is quickly revealing its systematic hostility toward religious minorities.

Where’s the hope in all these downward trends?

But then I look past the headlines and into the eyes of the people behind them. People like Bae*, who labors in a North Korean field during the day and sneaks away to worship at night. I see the Afghan refugees, who have been forced to follow Jesus in secret their entire lives, but now reveal their faith in public light. And I see Faith* and Damaris*, who have turned their most traumatic experiences into testimonies of triumph.

They are the people who remind me that just past the suffering waits a deeper, brighter hope. They make sure I remember to keep going toward Jesus.

In these pages, you’ll read about the things that keep them going toward Jesus. It’s projects like radio broadcasts that spread life-giving words behind the closed borders of North Korea. It’s the trauma care centers in Africa that facilitate inner healing after deeply painful experiences. It’s the presence of local church leaders who serve in secret, faithfully encouraging brothers and sisters who risk everything to follow Jesus. And, most of all, it’s your prayers and advocacy that fuel their resilient faith through difficult days.

Connection must remain the common thread in every effort to serve the persecuted church, because faith withers in isolation. We need each other to speak words of life, healing and hope when suffering closes in. We need to bear each other’s burdens without fearing bad news. And we need to run toward closed doors when others are turned away, so we can witness what God does in dark places.

It’s far too easy to keep the stories of suffering replaying in our minds, so we have to keep turning up the volume on the good things that God is doing. We must remember how miraculously He has opened unprecedented global access to Scripture, so more people than ever can read or listen to their own copy of the Bible. We must recall how millions of people have come to Jesus through online, underground networks. And we must repeat the stories of how He’s met each of us in hardship, drawing us closer to Jesus through oppression.

Those of us who enjoy religious freedom must not forget how God works all things, together, for good. Because if our persecuted brothers and sisters forget what God is doing—we will remind them.

We will remind them

One can’t tell the story of faith without telling the story of persecution

BY DAVID CURRY

Open Doors USA President and CEO David Curry advocates on behalf of those who are persecuted for their Christian faith. He provides leadership to Open Doors in its mission to encourage and help Christians who live under extreme restrictions, while advocating for freedom to remain strong in their faith.

His work reminds us, over and over again, that the tides can turn, the circumstances can change, that there are greater joys in the days ahead.
FRONTLINE FAITH

For Khamlar*, a 41-year-old believer in southern Laos, the day finally came when Open Doors presented him his first Bible. The Bible traveled from neighboring Thailand across potholed and muddy roads into Khamlar’s hands. That same day, 250 other Christians received their first copy of God’s Word. A precious gift in a country where acquiring a Bible is extremely difficult, and close to unaffordable. A copy costs $18—and the average monthly wage is $50.

Open Doors local partners Vilay* and Pastor Aloun* risked jail or large fines to transport the precious cargo. Vilay remembers how his uneasiness grew as they drove: “Many troubling thoughts started to linger in my head: If there is a checkpoint ahead, there will be trouble. What if the police stop us and learn ‘I HAVE BEEN PRAYING FOR THIS DAY’— 250 BELIEVERS RECEIVE THEIR FIRST-EVER BIBLES

that we will be distributing these Bibles? How long will they detain us in jail? How much are they going to fine us? What else could possibly happen to us? The risks, they say, were worth it as they pulled into the church to see a line of believers waiting with anticipation. “I remember their faces,” Vilay recalls. “Children and the elderly, mothers and fathers, church members and pastors—their smiles were glued to their faces as the Bible touched their hands.”

Like Khamlar, other believers shared their gratitude. Vernkeo*, a 41-year-old church elder, expressed his joy: “I am so thankful for the Bibles you provided. I love reading and learning about the Bible because it corrects me and helps me walk in the footsteps of God. Reading the Bible helps my faith grow stronger; the Bible is food for my soul.”

Soy,* 17, also received a Bible. When she was 14, she was imprisoned for a week because she had become a Christian. She is one of several young people whom Pastor Aloun cares for because they were abandoned by their families for choosing Jesus. A few months after having her first Bible, Soy told Vilay: “I never had a chance to own a Bible; it was shared with everyone at the church. In the evening, we have a Bible study led by Pastor Aloun, so I learn God’s Word every day. I now realize that God’s Word can comfort and encourage anyone. I can do things that I have never done before. I now share and preach His Word, which I have never done in the past.”

“Your support goes a long way,” he says. “When you provided these Bibles, you didn’t just give these believers a book. You gave them hope and a means to grow deeper in their relationship with the Lord.”

North Korea

“Thank you so much for the Bible. I can tell you that this will be a light that will shine in my heart. I have been praying for this day to come for a long time now.”

— Khamlar, a believer in Laos

Laos

“Baba (Father), we have clean water in our village!”

Throughout this community in northeast Nigeria, cries like this young girl’s rang out as families ran to gather around the new borehole Open Doors’ local partners provided. To these Christians in a majority-Muslim community, the liquid gushing from a new borehole represents life, faith and answered prayer.

Often, the Muslim community leaders prevent water access to these believers or make sure they’re last in line to draw water. To get water, women and children collected it from any available source, fetching water from rivers and almost-stagnant streams that quickly led to waterborne illnesses.

Through boreholes like these, you’re bringing new life—both physically and spiritually—to this Christian community and advancing the Church.

In 2021, through your support, Open Doors provided 10 boreholes to believers in Nigerian villages like this one. Thank you for bringing springs of life!

Impact Report

EACH ISSUE, SEE HOW YOUR SUPPORT AND PRAYERS ARE CHANGING LIVES AROUND THE WORLD

Nigeria

BOREHOLES BRING SPRINGS OF LIFE

“As a representative of the underground church here, I want to thank the international believers for helping keep our North Korean brothers and sisters alive. It may seem like a small thing to you—saying a short prayer, giving a gift—but for our North Korean church family, it can mean the difference between life and death.”

— North Korean believer overwhelmed by the supplies they received in China

Your support brought God’s Word to persecuted Christians

Your support is providing clean water to at-risk believers

*Nname changed to preserve security
Central Asia

BELIEVERS GATHER FOR REFRESHMENT, RENEWAL

The picture you see to the right was taken at a discipleship training for young, persecuted believers in Central Asia. (We can't disclose the specific country for their protection.) Open Doors partners recently led a seminar for 25 Christians from six house churches. The gathering, which could have been easily raided by police at any time, led to both renewal and inspiration. Here's just a smattering of what we heard from these young people:

“I repented 20 years ago, and I was told to dedicate my whole life to God, and I was afraid. Today, I have dedicated my whole life to God!” “Here I received such a fire; now with such a fire, I will serve God until the age of 80. Thank you.”

Kenya

PERSECUTED, WIDOWED MOTHER OF THREE DISCOVERS NEW HOPE

Sometimes stories come to our Open Doors team that tangibly reveal God's hand. Bouna,* an Open Doors discipler in Kenya, shares one such miracle.

“Our church had a collective prayer. We taught new believers about prayer and gave them a practical exercise: pray for a motorbike to help our pastor reach cell groups. A few days before their baptism, these Christians still had no answer. But then Open Doors offered to support us with a motorcycle. I almost screamed when I received the news. On our way to see the motorbike, I told one of the converts, ‘God has answered our prayers. We are on our way to collect the motorcycle the Lord has provided for us.’

“The new believers were awestruck. Thank you! May God bless Open Doors’ supporters, and may your ears be more sensitive to the voice of God for you to act.”

Mozambique

DISPLACED FAMILIES CELEBRATE LIFE-SAVING RELIEF

“This aid is a miracle. I thank God for not abandoning us and for creating good people in the world who think and care for others they don’t even know.”

Julia (below) is one of the many displaced believers in Mozambique who received desperately needed food and supplies when jihad attacks on Cabo Delgado province forced hundreds of families to flee their homes. Many ran with only the clothes on their backs.

She is also one of many who celebrated with worship when Open Doors partners surprised 328 displaced families with packages of food (maize, rice, cooking oil, beans, sugar, salt, tea and charcoal), kitchen utensils and bedding (mattresses, sheets, blankets and mosquito nets).

Iran

HOUSE CHURCHES = “ENEMY GROUPS”

Christian converts Amin Khaki, Milad Goodarzi and Alireza Nourmohammadi—all Christians now serving time in an Iranian prison—are not the first to be sent to prison for their involvement in a house church in Iran. But they are the first examples of the Islamic regime’s recent move to make it easier for judges to convict Christians and increase prison sentences for anyone who’s part of a house church.

Simply put, new amendments add vague terms that refer to house churches as “enemy groups” with “anti-security purposes” and up prison terms, starting automatically at five years and increasing from there.

Each of the three believers received the minimum sentence of five years in prison for “engaging in propaganda that eduicates in a deviant way contrary to the holy religion of Islam.”

These new amendments essentially prohibit anyone from changing their mind or determining for themselves what they believe. In Iran, it’s against the law to leave Islam or gather as a house church for any purpose related to Christian worship.

Unfortunately, this has been the norm in Iran since the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Since then, persecution of Christians has continued nonstop, but these additional amendments are definitely the next step in persecution.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

TARGETED AND TERRORIZED

The church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is grieving. Believers in the eastern part of the country have been repeatedly targeted by the Islamic extremist group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). In late 2021, Christians reported that militants attacked three villages near Komanda city, killing at least 19 Christians and displacing at least 13,000 believers. Many families are still missing loved ones.

Attackers also burned over 50 homes. The third attack reveals the brutality believers are facing. Inside a church compound, militants gathered and chained all those who were there seeking refuge from the killing. A pastor’s wife and grandchild lost their lives, and more than 50 were kidnapped. The need for refugee camps and provisions continues to grow.

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Pray for Christians in the DRC who have lost loved ones and are still searching for their family members. Ask God to strengthen those persecuted believers… our family.
INdra remembers how for weeks, she would crouch below the window of the church in her village, quietly listening to the gospel. Eventually, the words she heard rooted deep in her heart, and she received Jesus. Excitedly, she ran home to tell her husband about Him. But instead of joy, her Muslim husband greeted her news with a beating, severely wounding her. And yet Rubina pressed on. Each time she was caught going to church, she was beaten with a beating, severely wounding her. And yet Rubina pressed on. Finally, Rubina’s husband divorced her and kicked her out of their home. The local church she had become part of lead to false arrests and even imprisonment. Christians continue to come under attack by Hindu extremists, but over the last few months, the pressure has intensified. Extremist mobs are calling for the expulsion of Christians from the country. Radicals are demanding that officials take strict actions against Christians.

This is what persecution looks like in areas of India today.

Pray with believers in India who must live in a land so hostile to their faith. Ask God to confuse the plans of extremists leading against Christians.

At Open Doors USA, however, we realize this is only the first step. The goal of the World Watch List and other awareness-raising tools is to initiate action on the part of the global Church, and to encourage influential leaders to raise their voice in support of religious freedom. This means much more than just pointing out the issues—it means actively trying to fix those issues.

What does this look like? Usually, it starts with a conversation. We bring an issue and a suggested solution to members of Congress, or the White House, and ask them to raise these issues directly with other governments. In the easiest of cases that resolves the issue. Most of the time, it’s a lot more work.

One of the key points to communicate in these conversations is that we don’t want countries to be on the World Watch List. We believe it’s in every country’s best interest to ensure religious freedom. Studies show ensuring fundamental rights strengthens a nation’s economy and increases happiness across the population. It also helps build trust with allies and partners around the world.

Does this mean strong action isn’t sometimes necessary? Of course not. In 2021, Open Doors USA supported serious efforts to limit the use of religious minorities for forced labor in China, encouraged the U.S. State Department to consider possible sanctions against India and other countries for egregious violations of religious freedom, and generally urged the Biden administration to act quickly and firmly to address the worst persecution against Christians.

At the same time, we highlight when governments move in a positive direction. Vietnam, Uzbekistan, Sudan and Egypt to various degrees over the past two decades have made efforts to try and improve basic rights. Though these efforts often still fall short, they are usually rightly rewarded with the lifting of sanctions and increased aid.

In the end, we know we cannot eliminate all forms of persecution. Both Scripture and historical example make this clear. We can, however, work to improve conditions for the persecuted, and at the same time demonstrate our love for those who are committing persecution by making clear that we want what’s best for all involved. After all, Jesus instructs us in Matthew 5:44 to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

The vision of Open Doors USA advocacy is to bring relief to the persecuted, while demonstrating to those who commit persecution there is a different and better way. That means we never give up hope that one day, as impossible as it may seem, North Korea and Afghanistan will not even be found on the World Watch List. Until that day, we’ll not stop praying and advocating for the freedom to follow Jesus.

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

— Matthew 5:44

TO FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN BE INVOLVED IN OUR ADVOCACY WORK AND TO SIGN UP FOR REGULAR UPDATES, PLEASE VISIT ODUUSA.ORG/TAKE-ACTION/ADVOCACY
NOT BREAD ALONE
The life of a North Korean church leader

BY CHRISTOPHER SUMMERS
“Whenever I open my eyes in the morning, I have felt the presence of our Father.”

Each morning, Bae* wakes up and starts her day in a rustic shack in a rural village somewhere in the mountains of North Korea. Her husband is groggy from the short night of sleep, and she can hear the rustling of the other people in her house as they prepare for another day in the fields.

She hopes she’ll meet her work quota picking crops. She doesn’t want to risk additional punishment, or the loss of her brief moments during the day when she can forage for food.

Bae collects her food rations around 6 a.m. and trudges off to the fields. The government provides food for people like her—but just enough to keep them alive to work. She knows her breakfast won’t be enough to ease the gaping hunger in her belly. Like all the other people in her village, Bae is starving. She’s not hungry enough to die—at least, not yet. But the hunger is always there, gnawing at her bones like an ravenous animal.

Bae heads for the woods whenever she’s able to take a short break. The mushrooms and plants she collects from the forest help stem the growling in her belly, but that extra food is never a sure thing.

Finally, at dusk, she finishes her day. She gets another meal—some watery soup and, if she’s lucky, some rice—and returns to her home.

And then Bae gets to her real work. She waits for the moon to disappear behind the clouds, then silently pulls on her cloak. She slips out the front door, careful to close it quietly so her neighbors won’t hear. She sticks to the shadows as she carefully makes her way through the village and steals back into the forest.

But this trip isn’t about food. What she’s after is even more important. She finds the

Bae and her husband were sent to a remote village because they follow Jesus. But here’s why their ministry has flourished.

*Name changed to preserve security

EDITORS’ NOTE
Bae is a real person in North Korea, but her story has been slightly changed to ensure she cannot be identified. Where changes or additions were made, they are based on other firsthand accounts of life in North Korea for Christians.

Cover story

And then Bae gets to her real work.

There are around 400,000 Christians in North Korea— and they are all secret Christians.

When she gets home, her housemates are waiting—they’ve already covered the windows with blankets and lit a small candle. From the bag she dug up, she pulls out a book. Bae opens it and begins to read, in a voice barely above a whisper: “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

It’s another day in a North Korean church.

FAITH IN JESUS CAN BE A DEATH SENTENCE IN NORTH KOREA

Bae hasn’t always lived in this village. She moved here after she and her husband were caught with a Bible. As soon as North Korean authorities realized the couple were Christians, their lives as they knew them were over.

Faith in Jesus can be a death sentence in North Korea. Open Doors estimates there are around 400,000 Christians in North Korea—and they are all secret Christians. If they’re caught, they’re lucky to escape with their lives.

Bae and her husband were two of the “lucky” ones. Their lives were spared, but they were sentenced to a lifetime of hardship and labor.

They were put into the “hostile class” in North Korea, which means they are on the lowest rung when it comes to government aid, work assignments or any other official assistance. The couple was taken to a remote village and told they had to do backbreaking agricultural labor. They know they’ll live in the village until they die.

Though it might seem like a light sentence to be placed in a rural village, it’s not—the region is more like a prison than a farm. People like Bae are watched, and the roads in and out of these towns are monitored and guarded. Escape is a very dangerous prospect, and daily life becomes limited to the small area that surrounds the villages.

Bae was able to escape one time. She made it over the border into China, where she made contact with a safe house run by Open Doors partners. While there, she met with other Christians—a sweet experience of fellowship that is impossible in North Korea.

The leaders of the safe house gave Bae food, medicine and a new Bible. She sang, prayed and read Scripture with her new friends. She didn’t even have to be quiet.

She was offered the chance to stay in China and to live a life outside of the tight control back home. But Bae refused.

She returned home with the food, medicine and Bible she’d received, and she shared them with her secret group of believers. These gifts will sustain their faith for years.

‘This suffering is a blessing from our Father’

Recently, on another trip to China, Bae was able to pass a letter to an Open Doors partner, thanking Open Doors and supporters like you for their prayers and gifts. We can’t tell you how she got it to us, since doing so would put Bae in incredible danger. But it’s a powerful opportunity to hear from a Christian leader still inside North Korea.

Here is what she wrote:

Dear brother,

We are well and peaceful with Father’s grace and your concern.

We give thanks to the Father who is doing almighty works. I am so overwhelmed to write you this letter; we received the greatest love and concern, which cannot be returned. We live firmly in the suffering march, as always. Whenever I open my eyes in the morning, I feel the presence of our Father.

Right now we only receive materials from you—but we expect the day to come when we can return those back in God.

From the perspective of other people, our life of suffering must seem like a cursed life; however, this suffering is a blessing from our Father who allowed it in our life because it is a shortcut to the Father. He knows our suffering and listens to our prayers. We thank our Father who has done such great things to prepare life for us.

We who receive His amazing grace keenly realize and understand His words: “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the Father.” That means any life that follows His words is blessed.

The thing I give thanks for the most is that Father God uses me to work as His servant. I desire to dedicate my life, until death, to glorifying Him. Brother, I have one request. Please send our gratitude and appreciation to those who sent these support materials to us. I bow to them with a thankful heart. Let’s stay healthy and fight strongly for a gospellized North Korea.

Take care,

Bae, your sister in Christ

THERE ARE AROUND 400,000 CHRISTIANS IN NORTH KOREA— AND THEY ARE ALL SECRET CHRISTIANS.
Open Doors works through secret networks in China to strengthen North Korean Christians like Bae. Your support and prayers are vital to remind followers of Jesus they aren't alone, even in places like North Korea.
Kidnapping and sexual violence against Christians are widespread in Nigeria. Here’s how your prayers and support are helping believers find wholeness through Jesus.

On a September night in 2020, Ruth David and her five daughters were home alone while Ruth’s husband, Pastor Steven, was away, attending to church matters. Ruth and her daughters were chatting and laughing when, suddenly, they heard someone banging at the door.

The banging grew louder and more intense. Ruth knew she had to open the door or it would be knocked down. As she did, she suddenly realized she and her daughters were in terrible danger.

Armed Fulani militants stood in her doorway. They were looking for homes to rob, and had chosen Ruth and Steven’s home. But Ruth had no money to give them. And so the men decided Ruth and her daughters would be their “payment” and ordered them to go outside.

The women were forced to walk through the nearby bush, but Ruth quickly became tired. The men released her and continued with the girls. “We trekked for two days barefoot, and the road was rocky,” remembers Damaris, the eldest sister. “My sisters and I kept crying.”

The horror was only beginning. “We finally reached our location in the evening,” Damaris says. “It was a very big camp—there were more than 500 people—all chained together. At that moment, I knew that if God was not with us, we would not make it out. We endured 18 days of hardship, torment, hunger, fear and anxiety. Each morning, I called my siblings together to pray. I told them not to denounce God or lose faith, but they should hold on to God. Everything would be OK. After a week, the kidnappers asked for our parents’ contact numbers; they called and demanded [approximately $243,000], or they would kill us.”

Damaris could hear her parents crying over the phone. “They don’t have that kind of money,” she said. “They begged [the militants] to please spare our lives. Eventually the men said they would accept [about $4,800], two big bikes and some additional valuables. [Our captors] reminded my parents that they would not hesitate to kill us if they didn’t receive these things. I could hear my mom crying, ‘God have mercy on us,' as they ended the call.”

At home, Pastor Steven and Ruth were distraught. They kept praying for a miracle. “There is nothing more valuable and precious than my daughters; I would lay down my life for them,” Steven says. “To meet the militants’ demands, they sold our farm and anything of value they owned.”

The situation became worse. A man from another group of Fulani militants raped Faith a second time. “They asked where we were going, and we said home. One of them looked at me and ordered me to follow him. My heart sank. I was so scared. I [had just been] raped minutes ago and now I was picked again. My feet felt heavy as he ordered me to walk while pointing his gun at me. He grabbed me and threw me on the ground. At this point I asked God to take my life. The pain and humiliation were too much. I thought to myself, ‘If God really loves me, why would He allow me to experience this pain and shame twice?”

The girls finally reached their home and were reunited with their parents. “We cried together and sang songs of praise to God,” Damaris says. “When we shared our experience with our parents, they just wept.”

**Healing**

When Open Doors partners in Nigeria heard what happened to the women, they invited the family to spend a week at the Shalom Center, a trauma recovery center in Nigeria supported by Open Doors. Though Damaris and Faith received the brunt of these violent attacks, the whole family suffered.

The Shalom Center started operations in 2019 and has become a beacon of hope for Nigerian Christians who are targeted because of their faith. Open Doors team members noticed how many believers and their communities carry deep and lasting trauma from violent and horrific persecution events. When a believer is targeted for their faith, it impacts the entire community who sees how their brother or sister is hurt because of their belief in Jesus. The Shalom Center is geared toward helping people process their grief and trauma and learn to see themselves as God sees them: beautiful creations He delights in.

**Editors’ Note**

The following account contains descriptions of sexual violence. Please read with caution.

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**Healing**

When Open Doors partners in Nigeria heard what happened to the women, they invited the family to spend a week at the Shalom Center, a trauma recovery center in Nigeria supported by Open Doors. Though Damaris and Faith received the brunt of these violent attacks, the whole family suffered.

The Shalom Center started operations in 2019 and has become a beacon of hope for Nigerian Christians who are targeted because of their faith. Open Doors team members noticed how many believers and their communities carry deep and lasting trauma from violent and horrific persecution events. When a believer is targeted for their faith, it impacts the entire community who sees how their brother or sister is hurt because of their belief in Jesus. The Shalom Center is geared toward helping people process their grief and trauma and learn to see themselves as God sees them: beautiful creations He delights in.
The Open Doors Nigeria team knew the Shalom Center could help the David family as they recovered from the horrors of what had happened to them. “When we got to the gate, my mom refused to enter,” Faith remembers. “Seeing the rocky surroundings of the center triggered bad memories. It reminded her of the day we were taken. [But] when we finally entered the center, the environment was so serene. I forgot about what we had been through.”

The family spent the week attending sessions specifically designed to help survivors process trauma. Through these workshops and by God’s grace, the family found healing and acceptance. “We wrote down all our fears and pain; we then took it to the cross, and placed it at Jesus’ feet,” Faith says. “During the ceremony, I felt all my pain taken away, especially when they burnt the papers and I saw it turn to ash.”

Because healing is not always a linear process, the trauma center invited the family back for another week. “It was in this week that I discovered my identity in Christ,” admits Faith, on whom the double assault left deep emotional wounds.

During one session, each family member was asked to draw a self-portrait exactly as they saw themselves. One of our team members noticed Faith was crying and asked if she could talk to her. Faith opened up: “Since I was raped twice, self-hate and shame grew inside me. I felt dirty and unworthy, but now I know that despite what happened, God still sees me as a beautiful young woman. I’m fearfully and wonderfully made in His image.”

Now, a big smile has replaced the tears on Faith’s face. “I have more confidence now, and I’m ready to go and face the world with my head held high because I am valued by God,” she says. “Indeed, this center is a place of restoration where I have finally found my peace.”

Pastor Steven and his family are determined to live victoriously, despite the terrible experience. “My biggest fear when my daughters were kidnapped was that they would not return alive, but God brought them back,” Steven says. “Even though Damaris and Faith were raped, I told myself, where there is life, there is hope. And yes, our hope has increased coming here. God is truly present here; all our burdens, shame, tears and fears were lifted at the trauma center.”

Fulani militants often operate with few consequences in the Middle Belt of Nigeria. The Fulani are a largely Muslim people group in sub-Saharan Africa, though there are Christian Fulani. Traditionally, the Fulani are nomadic herders, and they’ve been pushed farther south as climate change has expanded the Sahara Desert. But increasingly, extremists within Fulani communities have begun to use religion as a way to target Christians for brutal violence in the name of both Islam and their need for grazing land. Open Doors has shown that Christians are attacked in much greater proportion in many areas, despite being minority populations in many parts of Central Nigeria. And it seems kidnapping and sexual violence are an increasing part of these attacks.

“How you can pray

- Thank God for the David family and the testimony of His faithfulness; He has brought out of their trauma and pain.
- Please pray for Faith, Damaris and the entire David family. Pray God will continue to heal their hearts and minds. Pray their testimony of God’s restorative power will help many others like them turn to God for healing.
- Pray for the Shalom Center. Pray many Christians in Nigeria affected by violence and insecurity can come to the center and find peace and healing. By God’s grace, the center is expanding to help many more Christians. Please pray for a successful expansion.

*Name changed to preserve security*
Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I'm 36 years old, and I'm married to an amazing woman who God used to bring me back to Him after years of questioning my faith. We live in a very small Ohio town with our dog, Gatsby. I have spent most of my life working in the culinary industry, and food has been a major passion of mine.

When did you first become aware of persecuted Christians?

When I was standing in a Christian bookstore and saw God’s Smuggler and read on the back what it was about—[that] led me to Open Doors. It made me rethink everything and how we sometimes take our faith for granted in this country, while others put their lives at risk for it. So I wanted to help raise awareness.

What's a place you have a heart for?

I'm always open to go wherever God wants me to go. However, I do have a heart that gravitates to the Middle East, especially Syria, Jordan and Iraq.

How do you serve the persecuted church through Open Doors?

Vertically and on social media. I'm always looking to do more, but right now, since I'm not far in my Connector role, I just share, share, share.

What's one piece of encouragement you'd offer to others about helping the persecuted church?

Do it! They need it and need us. If you live in the United States like I do, or a free country that won’t be on the World Watch List, then do it! Tell your friends at church or at work. You might think that it isn’t helping, but prayers lead to miracles and God hears them all. Soft or loud, He hears!

What’s one piece of advice you’d give to your child?

I would give my kids the verse Matthew 6:33: ‘But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.’ Putting God first in our life is the key to receiving all the lavish blessings the Father longs to give us. Our Father is a generous and giving God.

INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING?
CONTACT CONNECT@ODUSA.ORG FOR MORE INFORMATION.
Baldina, an elderly Christian in Cameroon, has been a nominal Christian for most of her life. But when her son was killed by the Islamic extremist group Boko Haram, she found her way back to church. "My heart was in turmoil," Baldina says. "Then I told myself that there, in the church, I will find peace. When I hear the message, listen to the songs, I am comforted. I thank God for everything. ... He is helping me to be strong today."

"Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the hip. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephra. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord."

**Isaiah 60:1-6**

**PRAY**

Lord, I pray for Christians like Baldina, who endure so much trauma and pain. I ask that they would see Your face and experience the peace only You can give. I pray they will find hope and healing in You, and that Your Spirit will equip them to live out the gospel. Thank You for your promise that the darkness will never eclipse the hope of Your light. I pray all these things in the name of Jesus, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

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—Ellen, an Open Doors supporter

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